

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 10**

### **Prophets and the Cult, Were the Prophets Writers?**

#### **A. Prophets Opposed to Cult Review**

We were looking at Scripture and the views for support of the idea that the prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cult. We referenced some texts in Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah, and I might say, some of those statements made by the prophets were pretty powerful statements and were a strong condemnation of the cult. Whether you then jump to the conclusion that the prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cult, I think is another question. But one cannot deny that there are some strong negative statements about cultic observance in Israel that were found in a number of the prophetic books.

#### **1. Some Statements Not Opposing the Cult**

##### **a. Isaiah**

What you immediately have to be aware of also, however, is that there are also some pronouncements by the prophets in which they appear to not be fundamentally opposed to the cult; they were not promoters of a cult-less religion as some have alleged. Isaiah, as we saw in chapter 1:11-17, speaks very strongly against what was going on in Jerusalem with respect to the bringing of sacrifices. He also, in his prophecy, proclaims that the temple is the house of Yahweh. He speaks of the Lord dwelling on Mount Zion. For him the temple is a place of God's special presence. He sees that vision of the Lord in the temple, high and lifted up, sitting on the throne. So, it doesn't seem like he's fundamentally opposed to the cult.

##### **b. Jeremiah**

Similarly, Jeremiah frequently calls the temple "the house which is called by my name," speaking in the name of the Lord in Jeremiah 7:10, 32:34, 34:15, and various other places. In Jeremiah 17:26, Jeremiah says, "People will come from the towns of Judah and the villages around Jerusalem, from the territory of Benjamin and the western

foothills, from hill country, and the Negev, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings, incense, and thank offerings to the Lord.” He speaks of that in a very positive way. God instructed David to build an altar in 2 Samuel 24:18, “In that day, Gad the prophet went to David and said to him, ‘Go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of the Araunah the Jebusite.’ So David went up as the Lord had commanded him.” So, here’s a prophet in 2 Samuel 24:18 telling David to build an altar. In Jeremiah 27:18—it’s interesting, Jeremiah had those sermons where he said the Lord was going to destroy the temple—but look at Jeremiah 27:18, “Plead with the Lord Almighty that the furnishings remaining in the house of the Lord and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem not be taken to Babylon.” He’s praying for the preservation of the temple. So there are a lot of expressions scattered through the prophetic books in which it is clear that the prophets were not anti-cultic in the sense that they desired a religion without the cult. They had positive things to say about the temple and the temple worship.

### c. Is There a Cultless Religion in the OT?

In fact, it seems to me the idea of religion without a cult is a rather strange idea. Certainly it’s in conflict with the data of Scripture. Enormous sections of the Pentateuch are given over to describing the regulations that God gave to Israel through Moses for the bringing of sacrifices and offerings. It is only by ascribing all that to some much later time and saying that it’s not Mosaic and not a part of the data that you say that the Bible doesn’t require sacrifice.

Besides, you might ask, what is religion without cult? Is morality alone religion? That gets to be a rather philosophical question. Many Anglicans accept this view that the prophets were fundamentally opposed to the cult, and see the prophets as simply preachers of ethics. But what that does is reduce religion to moralism. In one sense, as far as true biblical religion is concerned, moralism is really the destroyer of true religion. I think you could argue true religion without cult really doesn’t exist.

#### d) Christianity and the Cult

In our own context of the New Testament era, certainly Christianity cannot exist without the cult. What is religion without prayer, without offering, and without religious gathering? I think in its essence, true religion is fellowship with God, and if that's the case it must express itself in religious acts, not just in moral acts. This gets into the question of the horizontal and the vertical relationship. Yes, true religion requires that we love our neighbor as ourselves, that we preach against injustice on the horizontal level. But true religion also requires that we have fellowship with God and a relationship with God which expresses itself in prayer, praise, fellowship and consecration, et cetera. Such expressions are not just individual and private. They should be communal and public, that certainly is a clear teaching of Scripture.

#### 1. Cult Prescribed in the Pentateuch

So, it seems to me contradictory both to the Bible, particularly the Pentateuch and to the nature of true religion itself, to say that there was a time when Israel's religion was cult-less. In fact, Leviticus tells us that the cult was a gift of God to his people. Look in Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of a creature is in the blood and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." In this sacrifice of the Old Testament period, blood was shed. And God says, "I have given that to you on the altar, because it's the blood that makes atonement." So if you take the Old Testament as it presents itself, certainly you cannot conclude that cultic observances were assimilations of heathen practices taken over from the Canaanites. The Old Testament says these regulations were given to Israel by God through Moses. They were given as a means of atonement for sin ultimately pointing forward to the sacrificial work of Christ, who is the lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world. So I think that when you get the whole picture. It's unthinkable that the prophets could have been fundamentally opposed to the cult. It just is totally inconsistent with the whole of Old Testament revelation.

## 2. Prophets Condemned Heathenism in the Cult: Opus Operatum

What the prophets did condemn were the heathenisms that entered the Israelite cult where Yahweh came to be worshipped, much like a Baal or any other heathen deity, as well as a formalistic mechanical idea of the ritual system. There's a Latin phrase that's often used for that *opus operatum*, which means "by the work it is worked." In other words, you go through the ritual and that automatically produces the desired result. They would just go through these religious rites and think that by that alone they gained a certain favor with God. Then they'd live their life as they pleased.

### a) Hosea & Heathen Cultic Practices

In the time of Hosea, you've been working through the book of Hosea, and I think you're aware from that, Baal worship was prevalent in the Northern Kingdom. The fruit of the land was ascribed to Baal in Hosea 2:5 and 8. The people followed many heathen practices, including temple prostitution, that's in Hosea 4:11 and following. They were doing all these things, yet still bringing their sacrifices to the Lord. It's because of that that Hosea speaks out against the cult. They've made idols in Hosea 8:4-6. They had sacred pillars in Hosea 10:1, but they're still going through the rituals of Yahweh. It seems clear that what was in their mind, the Israelites' minds, was that there was safety in the outward form, just going through these forms, that's all that's required of them. Whereas Hosea realizes that that kind of cultic observance is absolutely worthless. It's an abomination to the Lord. God asked for more. As he says in Hosea 6:6 "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

### b) Ban Empty Rituals

If you go back to Isaiah 1 the people are bringing their sacrifices verse 11, they're bringing many of them and the Lord says, "What are they to me?" The reason he says that is at the end of verse 15, "your hands are full of blood." You're not living a life that shows any consecration or dedication to God or desire to walk in the ways of the Lord,

you're just going through these rituals. So they turned away from the Lord, they're just going through the forms, and the Lord says that's an abomination.

### 3. Amos 5:21-25 and the Cult

Now, I think the two passages that are probably the most difficult are the Amos 5 and Jeremiah 7, which we looked at before the break. Amos 5:21-25 is certainly one that's often appealed to. Particularly the rhetorical question of verse 25. "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings 40 years in the desert, O house of Israel?" It seems that the question is asked with the intended response of "No." Some understand the implication of that to be that Israel was disobedient already in the wilderness period and did not bring sacrifices to the Lord during the wilderness period.

#### a) McComiskey

If you look at your citations, page 12, there are a few paragraphs there from Tom McComiskey's commentary on Amos in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, where he says, "Verses 25 and 26 are difficult. Many commentators hold that because of the question of v. 25 expects that negative answer, Amos was affirming that sacrifice was unknown during the wilderness period, or that it was not regarded as necessary for a proper relationship with Yahweh, obedience being the sole requirement. But this interpretation does not do justice to the continuity of vv. 25-26 called for by the Hebrew particle *waw* (untranslated in the NIV) that begins verse 26." The NIV doesn't begin with a *waw* in the translation of 26; there's no "and" or "but" there, it just says, "You lifted up the shrine of your king." "Nor does it adequately explain why a statement denying the efficacy of sacrifice was placed in the judgment section of the oracle. The question (of verse 25) calls for a negative answer: "no," the Israelites did not sacrifice then. Evidently the forty-year period was a time when obedience to the Lord or obedience to the Levitical institutions had declined. This period began with the defection of the Israelites at Kadesh. The defection to idolatry in this wilderness period is emphasized in the prophetic tradition." So, as McComiskey reads this passage he's saying verse 25 is a rhetorical question—the response is "no," because Israel didn't observe sacrifices during the

wilderness period, but they did do something else.

He translates that *waw* introducing verse 26 as a *waw* adversative; his next line there is verse 26 begins with the *waw* best understood as adversative, “but you have lifted up the shrine of your king the house of your idols.” So Israel disobeyed God by neglect of sacrifice and turned to idolatry. That’s why he reads 25 and 26 referring to the wilderness time. The words “shrine” and “pedestal” need not be altered.

There’s a lot of discussion of how to interpret and translate verse 26. But his conclusion is, “The verse refers to the implements of idolatrous worship of an unknown astral deity. Seen in this way, v. 26 fits the formal structure well, for Amos, like Ezekiel and Hosea, traced the disobedience of God’s people into their history.” So that’s the way McComiskey views that rhetorical question and of course that rhetorical question is the one that people say implies a negative answer towards a cult-less religion. Well, McComiskey says it’s not really intended to be a cult-less religion because Israel was disobedient in the wilderness period and didn’t observe sacrifices and instead turned to idolatry.

#### b. Ridderbos on Amos 5

There’s a Dutch Old Testament scholar J. Ridderbos who wrote a commentary on Amos and questions an interpretation like that of McComiskey and asks whether that is really the best way to go about verse 25 and 26. In Ridderbos’ discussion of Amos 5 he suggests that in the preceding context the issue is the Lord’s rejection of presently brought offerings. Go back up to Amos 5:21, “I hate, I despise your religious feasts. Even though you bring me burnt offerings, I will not accept them.” The issue was presently brought offerings and he thinks it’s hard to argue the Lord would reject present offerings on the basis that they had neglected to bring offerings in the wilderness period. What’s the connection there between verse 21 and 22 and what apparently is being addressed in verse 25? What he suggests is that 25 really continues the thought of 22 in the sense that the bringing of sacrifices is not the primary and only thing that the Lord asks of Israel. If you look at the Pentateuch, it seems that the sacrificial system was instituted in the

wilderness period, and that Israel, at least partially, did observe the ritual system during the time of the wilderness journeys. In Numbers 16:46, the fire of the altar is mentioned, and that presupposes daily sacrifices were being brought, but apart from Numbers 16:46, you don't get any explicit references to observance of the sacrificial system during the wilderness wanderings.

But Ridderbos, his view is "offerings undoubtedly were brought, but there probably was not a complete and regular observance of all of the sacrificial system during the wilderness period because of the conditions under which the Israelites were living." So his suggestion is that the purpose of that rhetorical question in verse 25 is less absolute than it might appear. He's not suggesting that no sacrifices whatever were brought in the wilderness, but rather that in that wilderness time there was much lacking.

The line of argument, then, that Amos is advancing is that sacrifices don't have the heightened significance that the Israelites were attaching to them—namely, that ritual observances by themselves were the essence of true religion. "Did you bring me sacrifices in the wilderness?" The complete ritual system wasn't observed in total. Sacrifices are not the essence of true religion. True religion is a heart desire to be obedient to the Lord. That goes back to the statement in 1 Samuel 15, "to obey is better than sacrifice;" that's what the Lord desires. So, whether you take McComiskey's view or a view like that of Ridderbos, certainly what verse 25 is saying is not that Mosaic religion was intentionally cult-less or that true religion is simply a matter of ethics.

#### 4. Jer 7:21-23 and the Cult

The other text that I think is difficult is Jeremiah 7:21-23. Some have argued that from this anti-cultic viewpoint this is the most critical passage, because in verse 22, you have the statement, "When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices." What do we do with that statement?

##### a. Rawls Response with Exod 19:5

There are two suggestions that I might give. One is that of Rawls, who says, "At

the very first approach of Jehovah to Israel with the offer of the covenant,” that’s in Exodus 19, “even before the Decalogue had been promulgated, it was at this earliest coming together of Jehovah and Israel God refrained from saying anything about sacrifices, simply saying the entire agreement between the people and himself was based on their loyalty and obedience.” See that’s Exodus 19:5. ““Now if you obey me fully, keep my covenants, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to Israel.” That first presentation of the covenant says nothing about sacrifice. So, “When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices,” may refer to that initial presentation. So that’s one way you might deal with verse 21.

b. OT Allis’ Response: Concerning → for the sake of

O. T. Allis has a different suggestion. I have his in your citations, page 11, “The reason for the startling words we have just considered is given in words almost equally surprising: ‘For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.’ These words seem at first glance to bear out fully the claim of the critics that Jeremiah knew nothing about a sacrificial system introduced by Moses at the time of the Exodus. But such a conclusion rests on the failure of the English translation to do justice to the ambiguity of the Hebrew word rendered ‘concerning’; and particularly to the fact that, as is made clear by studies of the usage, they may also be rendered by ‘because of’ or ‘for the sake of.’ It is obvious that if in Jeremiah 7:22 we employ the stronger rendering ‘because of’ or ‘for the sake of,’ this verse not merely ceases to support the inference which the critics base upon it, but it becomes exceedingly appropriate in the context.” I think the strength of Allis’ argument here is his suggestion of how well it fits the context. “The Lord does not say to Israel that he gave no commands to their fathers **concerning** sacrifice. At first the people listening to Jeremiah might think that was his meaning, but a moment’s reflection would convince them that could not be the true meaning of his



words. What Jehovah meant was that he did not speak to their fathers **for the sake of** sacrifices, as if He needed them and would suffer hunger unless he were fed by the grudging offerings of sinful men who had no conception of the real relation in which they stood to Him.

The language appears to be intentionally ambiguous, even startlingly so. But the words “Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices and you eat the flesh” are intended to give a clue to their meaning.” You see, go back up to verse 21, “This is what the Lord Almighty, God of Israel says, ‘Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves.’”

You see what Allis is saying here is, “Then after pointing out in a striking way that God has no need of sacrifices of His creatures, the prophet goes on to declare that obedience was the real aim and requirement of the Sinaitic legislation.” No part of the burnt offering was to be eaten. So when it says in 21, “Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves,” The Lord is saying, in effect, that those who grudged him that part of their offerings, which he has claimed as his own, are welcome to keep the whole of it for themselves. He doesn’t want or need that kind of a sacrifice. So, “Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves, for when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands.”

The NIV says “about burnt offerings.” But you see what Allis’ translation does. The King James says “concerning” and the NIV says “about,” but that’s the *’al* preposition, you look up the Hebrew text there, *’al*. How do you translate that *’al*? Is it “about” or “concerning” as the NIV and King James say? Allis says “no;” it should be “because of” or “for the sake of.” In other words, “When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands ‘for the sake of’ burnt offerings and sacrifices,” because I don’t need them. You can keep them for yourself. That suggestion I think, fits better with verse 21. “Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves,” I don’t need your sacrifices. What I want is your obedience. So, again, I think what Jeremiah’s doing is not saying that sacrifices are

something that the Lord fundamentally opposes. It is the manner in which the Israelites were bringing the sacrifices that the Lord was opposing.

### 3. The Place of Ritual in Religion

Probably in an evangelical community this is not an issue, not a question people are addressing. You go to a university campus where students take a course in the “Bible as Literature” this is the kind of material they’ll be talking about. It’s in all these textbooks that are used in that kind of a treatment of the Old Testament. So, I’m sure there are a lot of people out there who think it’s opposed to these kinds of ideas. If nothing else it does call our attention to the question of why the prophets do speak so strongly to Israel about their ritual obedience. Because then it brings up the question, what is the place of ritual in worship? That’s an ongoing continual issue even today. What’s the place of ritual in our worship? In different forms you can fall into the same kinds of abuse of ritual today as the Israelites did in the Old Testament period. You think by simply going to a church, reciting certain creeds, offering certain prayers, you gain favor with God. Not if your life is not at the same time giving some evidence that you are desirous of living in the way that the Lord intends you to live. The rituals do not automatically bring God’s blessing and benefit. That’s not to say they’re unimportant either and that we should cast them aside, because their use is real.

### B. The Prophets Were Cultic Functionaries

#### 1. Explication of the View

Let’s go on to B., the other extreme of this position, that is, “The prophets were cultic functionaries.” 1. under that is, “Explication of the view.” I would say today there is greater recognition than there was 30 or 40 years ago that the prophets were not fundamentally opposed to the cult, but the pendulum has swung. In the last 50 years or so there’s been a movement among a certain segment of Old Testament scholars to tie the prophet and the cult so closely together that the prophets as well as the priests are viewed as official cult functionaries.

a. Aubrey R. Johnson advocates

One of the advocates of this view whose work has been translated into English is Aubrey R. Johnson. If you look at the bottom of page 12, you have citations from his volume *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel*, he says, “As a result the intercessory acts of the prophet’s role has been more or less overlooked. Yet it is undoubtedly true that the *nabi* or prophet, as a professional figure, was as much the representative of the people as the spokesman of Yahweh; it was part of his function to offer prayer as well as to give the divine response or oracle. This being the case, the question again arises as to what exactly was the status of these consultative specialists. Had they, like the early prophets, a standing within the cultus akin to that of the priest? In particular, should we think of the Jerusalem prophets as being the members of the temple personnel?” Of course that’s a question, but his conclusion is “yes.”

b. Sigmund Mowinckel and Cultic Prophets

There is a lot of the movement towards including the prophets as part of the cult in the sense that they were cultic functionaries, which comes from the influence of a Norwegian Old Testament scholar by the name of Sigmund Mowinckel. You’ll find his name in your bibliography. He published several volumes on the Psalms, and in one of those volumes, he argued that in the Psalms, God sometimes speaks directly. For example, Psalm 75:2 and following says, “We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks, for your Name is near; men tell of your wonderful deeds. You say, ‘I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge uprightly. When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm.’” You see there in the first verse, God is speaking much like the form of prophetic speaking. Mowinckel argued from examples of that sort that you get a prophetic speech sort of style embedded in many of these psalms. From that he concluded that most of the Psalms originated in the cult and that the words of many parts of the psalms were spoken by prophets who were connected with cultic observances. He called them “cult prophets.” So the first person singular he regarded as an oracular response of the prophet who was bringing God’s word to the worshiping people as they

were gathered. So in addition to the priest, who brought offerings at the temple you had a person who gave an oracle there. He brought the word of God in the context of religious worship. So, his conclusion was prophets and priests were two different offices of the temple service, or the worship at various other sanctuaries. Sometimes they might be united in one person—Ezekiel was a prophet and a priest—but generally, he felt they were two separate individuals, both cultic functionaries.

## 2. Scriptural Support is Weak

You may ask, “Where is the scriptural support for this?” In the writings of these people there’s very little direct scriptural support for the theory. Some argue Samuel was attached to the tabernacle at Shiloh. He was attached to the place of sacrifice at Ramah. You have scattered references to prophets and priests being mentioned together. For example, Isaiah 28:7 where you get this statement, “Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine.” So priests and prophets are mentioned in the same sentence as if they are somehow connected with each other. Jeremiah 4:9, you have a similar reference ““In that day,’ declares the Lord, ‘the king and the officials will lose heart, the priests will be horrified, and the prophets will be appalled.’” It lists priests and prophets together. You have Elijah connected with sacrificial rites or ceremonies there on Mount Carmel, when he confronts the priests of Baal. You have prophets appearing in the temple, Jeremiah, for example. In the book of Jeremiah chapter 7 he is at the temple court. See these are all indirect kind of references. There’s little explicit evidence on which to base the theory.

## C. The View the Prophets Were Neither Anti-Cultic as such, nor Cultic Functionaries, but Simply Proclaimers of Divine Revelation

Let’s go on to 3., “Assessment of the view.” If you look at the article on prophecy in the *New Bible Dictionary*, J. Motyer writes, “the basis for the cult prophet position is largely inferential. It is difficult to see how any theory could be stable when it rests on such slight foundations.” I think he’s right in that there’s very little direct evidence that supports the conclusion that the prophets were cultic functionaries. E. J. Young in his

volume *My Servants the Prophets* says, “We would leave the question as to the precise relation between the prophets and the temple unanswered. We do not think sufficient evidence has been given in the Scripture to enable one to pronounce with certainty on the matter.” Johnson’s monograph, that’s one we looked at on *The Cult Prophet in Ancient Israel*, serves as a wholesome corrective to the attitudes that became prevalent under the schools of Wellhausen that would be anti-cultic. So it’s a corrective to that. It does cause us to see that there was indeed some connection between the prophets and the place of sacrifice. What this connection was, however, we, for our part, are unable to say. We’re unable to follow Johnson’s contention that the prophets were cultic specialists. I think Motyer is correct in that it largely rests on unsolid evidence.

So let’s go on to C., “The view the prophets were neither anti-cultic as such, nor cultic functionaries, but simply proclaimers of divine revelation.” It seems to me this is where the bottom line is. We have talked from the beginning that the prophetic function rests on divine calling. God could call a priest to function as a prophet. Ezekiel was an example of that. He could call a farmer as Elisha and Amos were. Whoever it was, that person was called by God to proclaim his word; God put his word in their mouth and they gave God’s message to God’s people. It seems to me that when you look at the whole of the Old Testament, and the writings of the prophets, the conclusion is: the prophets were neither against the cult as such, nor professional cultic officials. We have very little evidence for either of those positions. Sometimes the prophets denounced the cult, but they did so when it deviated from its intended purpose; they weren’t fundamentally opposed to it. I think what the prophets promoted was what I would call a “covenantal unity” of the inward disposition of the heart to love the Lord with all your heart, mind and soul, and the outward expression of that love in both ethical and moral uprightness, doing justice, loving one’s neighbor, et cetera, as well as in the performance of worship according to divinely prescribed standards. So you need all of those components, you just don’t go through rituals and expect to gain God’s favor. Those rituals must be combined with a love for the Lord and a desire to live in a way for the Lord’s purposes. That’s done both by ethics and by ritual observance.

Cultic acts have no value in themselves. I think that's something that the prophets are telling ancient Israel, it's something they can tell us as well. Cultic acts are meaningful only when they are performed as an expression of undivided love for God and a desire to walk in his ways. When a person loves God and desires to walk in his ways, that will come to expression in ritual acts. But ritual acts separated from that love for God and desire to walk in his ways are an abomination to the Lord. I think that's what the prophets are saying when they condemn what's going on in Israel with respect to the multiplication of the burning of offerings but living lives that were completely contrary to what God's desires were.

#### VIII. The Composition of the Prophetic Books – Were the Prophets Writers?

Let's go on. Roman numeral VIII. is, "The Composition of the Prophetic Books—Were the Prophets Writers?" There are 3 or 4 sub-points. A. is, "Traditional View." B. is, "Literary Critical School." C. is, "History and Traditional School, that's the oral tradition school."

##### A. The Traditional View

The writing prophets are so-called because they put their message in writing in order that it might be preserved in permanent form. According to that view the prophets were writers. Perhaps passages such as Jeremiah 36:1-28 and Isaiah 30 verse 8 can cast some light on the method in which things were written down.

##### 1. Jeremiah 36:1-28

Jeremiah 36:1-28 is quite interesting. Let's look at that. It is the most explicit description of putting a prophetic message in written form. You read "In the fourth year of Jehoiakim king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now. Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin.'" So the

Lord tells Jeremiah to get a scribe put this message down in writing.

So what's Jeremiah do? Verse 4, he "called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the Lord had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll." Then that scroll was taken to the court and read to the king. What'd the king do? You read in verse 21, "The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and Jehudi brought it from the room of Elishama the secretary and read it to the king and all the officials standing beside him. It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him. Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire." In verse 26 you read "The king commanded Jerahmeel, a son of the king, Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. But the Lord had hidden them," so they didn't get arrested.

"After the king burned the scroll containing the words that Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 'Take another scroll and write on it all the words that were on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim king of Judah burned up. Also tell Jehoiakim king of Judah, "This is what the Lord says: You burned that scroll and said, 'Why did you write on it that the king of Babylon would certainly come and destroy this land and cut off both men and animals from it?'" Therefore, this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: 'He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed.'"

So, the Lord tells Jeremiah put this message on a scroll and Jeremiah dictates the message and the scribe copies it down, it's sent to the king, he burns it, then the Lord gives him the message again and he writes it down again.

## 2. Isaiah 30:8

Isaiah 30 verse 8 is another text that has a reference to writing, where it says, "Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for days to come it may be an everlasting witness." So the message had been given and the Lord said, "Write it, on a

scroll.” Now those two passages are probably the clearest passages that address the issue of “Were the prophets writers?” And they cast some light on the methods by which prophetic books that came down to us. We don’t know a lot more than these few sorts of comments. There’s not a great deal of internal evidence to establish the method followed in each case but it seems clear that at least in some cases, the prophets wrote the messages themselves perhaps others took down the message and preserved the message if it was delivered orally, but it does appear that the prophets were writers, not merely speakers. We don’t know clearly if in every case, the prophet himself wrote the material that was contained in the book that bears his name, whether it was written down by scribes or edited and put together by someone else. But the traditional view is that the prophets were writers.

#### b. The Literary Critical School

B. is, “The Literary Critical School.” In the literary critical school, the prophets were also looked at as writers. However, the big task that the literary critics set themselves out to perform was to sort out and separate what was original from what was added later. So, they tried to distinguish the original from the secondary accretions of later times to determine what was authentic and the truth, attributable to the prophet whose name the book bore, as compared to what had been added later. Very quickly, rationalistic ideas that exclude genuine predictions began to play a role. You come across prophetic statements, in particular of Isaiah, talking about Cyrus, that was not possible and must have come from someone else, not Isaiah the prophet. There are many illustrations of this.

So what I want to do under the literary critical school is speak about two books that are particularly under attack as not being the very words of the prophet whose name the book bears. Those two books are Isaiah and Daniel.

Not so much Isaiah 1-39, where and there’s a lot of variation here. Even among critical scholars there’s a general willingness to attribute at least much of 1-39 to Isaiah the prophet in the time of Ahaz and Hezekiah. But when you get to chapters 40-66,



there's a pretty broad consensus that that's not Isaiah speaking, but rather Second Isaiah in the time of Cyrus, at the end of the Babylonian captivity. Similar things are done with Daniel. So let's look at Isaiah and Daniel under the Literary Critical School.

### 1. Isaiah 40-66 – or “Second Isaiah”

It's frequently asserted by mainstream literary critics that Isaiah is not the author of chapters 40-66 of the book of Isaiah. It's usually referred to as Deutero-Isaiah by scholars who move in the mainstream of contemporary biblical studies. You will find that in the titles of commentaries. You'll find it in mainstream commentaries, a commentary on Isaiah and a commentary on Deutero-Isaiah. You get one volume on Isaiah 1-39, another volume on chapter 40 and following.

#### 1. Rachel Margalioth

You look at your citations, page 14, there's a very interesting study on Isaiah by a woman, Rachel Margalioth, a Jewish scholar, arguing for unity of the book of Isaiah. Notice what she says there at the top of the page, “The assumption that the book of Isaiah is not the work of one author, but that chapters 40 to 66 belong to an anonymous prophet who lived during the Return to Zion, is regarded as one of the most important achievements of biblical criticism. This judgment has gone beyond scholarly circles and has been generally accepted by all classes, and become part of biblical schooling. One rarely encounters an enlightened person who does not accept it as an unquestionable truth.”

Interesting statement. “The division of the book was first expressed by the critical school of Doederlein (1775). His system was developed and expanded by the Christian critics”, and she has a whole host of them there. “Many Jewish scholars followed in their wake,” among these mentioned is Kraus and his “scientific commentary on Isaiah.” “It is an accepted fact among modern commentators that chapters 40 to the end are not by Isaiah.’ He continues: ‘According to our present state of knowledge, it would be a fruitless effort on the part of anyone to try to prove the authenticity of these chapters,

since it is shown by internal evidence that they cannot be ascribed to the true Isaiah.””  
Now that’s the typical kind of statement that you find in the literature.

## 2. R. N. Whybray

She wrote that book in 1964, if you come up to a more recent discussion of this, look at page 15A under R. N. Whybray, *The Second Isaiah*. I don’t know if you’re aware of that series of volumes called the Old Testament Guides. They’re little books, usually hundred and fifty pages at most, and there’s one for each book of the Old Testament. What it does is introduce you to authorship, date, it’s much like Freeman, except a book on each canonical book with major interpretive issues, critical analysis of the authorship, date, and historical background. When you come to Isaiah in the Old Testament Series, there’s not just one volume for Isaiah, see there’s a volume for Isaiah, and then there’s this volume, *The Second Isaiah*, for chapters 40 to 66. Whybray writes this saying, “This volume, like my commentary on Isaiah 40-66 in the New Century Bible, my two monographs... is the outcome of constant preoccupation with the second half of the Book of Isaiah since I first prepared lectures on it in 1965. I believe that the view which has for many years been almost universally held, that chapters 40 to 55 are substantially the work of a single anonymous ‘prophet of the Exile,’ remains valid and is likely to remain the view of the majority of scholars.” So, when you ask who was the author of Isaiah 40 to 66? It’s an anonymous prophet, living at the time of the exile. We don’t know who it was. Pretty much a consensus that Isaiah himself did not write the second part of the book.

## 3. Basis for Second Isaiah Argument

Now, what’s the basis for coming to that kind of a conclusion? When you look at the arguments that you find in those who advocate this Deutero-Isaiah view, the grounds usually advanced are basically three arguments. I’ve tried to reduce the essence of this down to three fundamental arguments.

a. The Concepts and Ideas found in Isaiah 40 to 66 are said to differ significantly from Isa. 1-39

a. “The concepts and ideas found in Isaiah 40 to 66 are said to differ significantly from the concepts and ideas that appear in the uncontested sections of the first part of the book,” that is, the first part of the book ascribed to Isaiah. In other words, there’s some hedging there, because some scholars will say not all of first Isaiah belongs to Isaiah, there seems to be some secondary material there. But in general, the argument is that if you look at the concepts and ideas presented in Isaiah 1-39, and compare them with the concepts and ideas you find in 40-66, there’s a significant enough difference in concepts and ideas to draw the conclusion that this is not the work of a single author, because of difference in concepts and ideas. We’ll come back and look at responses to these arguments and fill out the arguments a bit more fully in a minute.

b. A Noticeable Difference in Language and Style Between the Two Parts of the Book of Isaiah

The second argument alleges that there’s a noticeable difference in language and style between the two parts of the book. That gets more technical, looking at word use, grammatical constructions, that kind of thing. From that they attempt to argue two parts of this book could not have been written by the same person, because its language and style differs.

c. The Historical Background of Chapters 40-66 is not the Historical Background of Isaiah’s time

The third argument says that the historical background of chapters 40-66 is not the historical background of Isaiah’s time. Isaiah lived in the time of Ahaz and Hezekiah on into the time of Manasseh. In chapters 40-66 Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed, the people are in exile in Babylon and they are about to be released from exile by means of this Persian ruler, Cyrus, who was mentioned by name. So the conclusion is Cyrus must have already arrived on the world scene by the time this was written. But most of the scholars who take this view would argue that it’d be impossible for anyone to know the name of Cyrus in the time of Isaiah the prophet from Ahaz and Hezekiah’s time. So those are the three general arguments: concepts and ideas, language and style, and historical

background; they are different in chapters 40-66 from what preceded. If you read the people who discuss it and then distill down what they say, as far as support for Deutero-Isaiah, you would find that these are where the arguments center.

## 2. Evaluation: Counter Arguments

### a) Concepts and Ideas Differ from the second Part of the Book

Let's look at the first argument, "Concepts and ideas differ from the second part of the book to the uncontested first part of the book." I would argue that this argument is not conclusive and cannot be conclusive because it depends on a person's judgment as to what extent differences in concept and ideas indicates or requires a difference in authorship. I think ultimately that's a subjective determination. Differences in concepts and ideas does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that a different author is required. Notice, advocates of the position do not claim there are contradictions in concepts and ideas between the two portions of the book. If there were contradictions this would be a much stronger argument, but that's not the argument. I think that it's difficult to argue that differences in concepts and ideas require a difference in authorship. All the more so when you've considered that the book, if you accept what it claims to be, is not just human words, but a divine word; it's divine revelation. Isn't it possible that God could communicate different ideas, and truths and concepts in different periods of the prophetic life of one individual, namely, Isaiah? Isaiah lived and ministered for a long period of time. It appears that his ministry went from about 740 to 681 B.C. That would be 60 years approximately. Now over a period of 60 years is it possible that there could be development in concepts and ideas? You would hope so. Does that mean you have to conclude there's a different author? As I go on and say here, why, for example, should this special revelation concerning the service of Yahweh not be given for the first time in the latter portion of Isaiah's life? Now that's a new concept that's in the second half of the book, the servant of the Lord theme is a theme we don't have in the first part of the book that develops in the second part of the book. Would that require a different author?

There's a citation on page 13 where Driver says, for example, that the God

concept in Isaiah 40 to 66 is “larger and fuller,” those are his words, Is that something to be considered impossible in the writing by the same prophet? When Driver says, “The divine purpose in relation to the nations, especially in connection with the prophetic mission of Israel, is more comprehensibly developed.” Does that require a different author? Or is that just progression in thought over time? Driver argues for the difference in concepts and ideas as being a basis for difference in authorship. However, he admits there’s no essential distinction between the two sections when he says, “Truths which are merely affirmed in Isaiah,” that’s the first part of the book, “being here made the subject of reflection and argument.”

So, it seems to me this argument rests to a large extent on that subjective judgment. How much does difference—and particularly differences which are not contradictory, show development, and perhaps introduction of new ideas and themes—how much does that, in and of itself, force you to the conclusion that you must have had a different author? That’s a judgment call. It’s not a necessary conclusion.

In fact, A. Comica, in a study in French, made an argument for the unity of the book on the basis of agreements in concepts and ideas between the two sections. There are a lot of features of Isaiah 1-39 and 40-66, where you do find agreement in concepts and ideas. So it’s not as radical at this junction as might be suggested by some of the advocates of the Deutero-Isaiah theory. I guess we’d better stop here and pick it up on page 3, “Argument from language and style,” which I think is a more important argument than concepts and ideas.

Transcribed by Dan Montgomery  
 Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt  
 Final editing by Katie Ells  
 Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt